

Businesses to BLM: We bank on backcountry

Great Falls Tribune

September 11, 2014 Karl Puckett

The Missouri River Breaks in the Crooked Creek area is known for its elk and mule deer hunting. Businesses that count on the outdoors are urging the Bureau of Land Management to protect areas such as these.(Photo: Tribune photo/Karl Puckett)

More than 200 sportsmen-dependent businesses from across the country are urging the U.S. Department of the Interior and Bureau of Land Management to conserve backcountry BLM lands, arguing the remote country not only offers prized hunting and fishing opportunities but also is good for the bottom line.

The businesses have sent a letter to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and BLM Director Neil Kornze asking them to conserve BLM backcountry areas in the West to sustain public land hunting, stand up for outdoor-related businesses and support areas of high-quality wildlife habitat.

“Public lands hunting is absolutely paramount to our business,” said Ryan Callaghan, marketing manager for First Lite, an up-and-coming performance hunting clothing manufacturer in Ketchum, Idaho.

Callaghan was in Great Falls this week for a media summit on public land and water issues organized by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. A key topic was BLM resource management plans the agency’s offices are revising for land covering 123 million acres in the West, including Montana.

TRCP is among a coalition of sportsmen’s groups who are in the process of trying to develop local support for conserving intact and undeveloped backcountry prized for hunting and wildlife habitat, via the resource management planning process, TRCP’s Joel Webster said.

The sportsmen support elevating the value of the wildlife habitat in certain backcountry areas, but also protecting existing uses, such as grazing, as well existing access, said Webster, calling it a moderate approach to backcountry conservation.

The country’s \$646 billion per year outdoor recreation-based economy is one of the nation’s most stable sources of economic growth, the 212 business owners say in the “banking on BLM backcountry” letter.

Retailers, manufacturers and service providers from Montana, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming signed the letter the BLM and Interior Department.

The Montana businesses that signed are based in Helena, Florence, Missoula, Bozeman, Hamilton, Philipsburg, Dillon, Yellowstone, Stevensville, Butte and Corvallis.

“Conscientious backcountry management can maintain strong economic engines in rural communities and sustain stable jobs associated with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation,” the letter says.

The revisions in the resource management plans will decide how resources such as backcountry hunting and fishing areas will be managed over the long-term, Webster said.

Reach Tribune Staff Writer Karl Puckett at 406-791-1471, 800-438-6600 or kpuckett@greatfallstribune.com. Twitter: @GFTrib_Kpuckett.

<http://www.greatfallstribune.com/story/news/local/2014/09/12/businesses-blm-bank-backcountry/15494939/>